

Mr. Willis Jenkins

Cornell Technical Services, LLC

Mr. Jenkins retired from NASA, effective December 31, 2020. He was the Senior Program Executive for NASA's Explorer Program in the Science Mission Directorate/ Heliophysics Division at NASA Headquarters. He was responsible for projects from definition and formulation through funding and accomplishment of objectives for the oldest cost-effective program at NASA dedicated to exploration within the heliophysics and astrophysics science areas. The Explorers Program is the only program at NASA for which the scientist received a Nobel Prize and the first HBCU, Hampton University, to develop, launch and operate a major mission. Mr. Jenkins was responsible for managing the first and only NASA mission (THEMIS) to launch five spacecraft on a single rocket.

Jenkins began his NASA career as an electrical engineer at the Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md., in 1994. He came to NASA headquarters as a Program Executive detailee for the Explorers Program in 2000 and later permanent in 2003. He was the Instrument Systems Manager for the Solar Terrestrial Relations Observatory (STEREO) and Magnetospheric MultiScale (MMS) Projects in 2002-2003. In 2019, Jenkins was instrumental in providing a formula for a Commemorative coin in collaboration with NASA and the US Mint.

Jenkins has been awarded three of NASA's highest honors, Medal for Exceptional Service (2021), NASA Equal Employment Opportunity Medal (2008) and the Medal for Exceptional Service (1999). He has also garnered accolades for his work performance within and external to the agency, including several outstanding team efforts in Earth and Space science. He was nominated Black Engineer of the Year in 2001. He also received the outstanding Professional Excellence in Federal Career Award, signed by Senator Barbara Mikulski of Maryland (ret.). At Headquarters, Jenkins also assisted the Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity (ODEO), the Office of Education, the NASA Speaker's Bureau and the Science Mission Directorate by participating in outreach events, at which he addresses space flight, career development and the value of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Prior to NASA, Jenkins enjoyed a successful career in the private sector. As an electrical systems manager at McDonnell Douglas, Seabrook, MD, he managed the electrical systems for all NASA Pegasus launch vehicle missions and supported the orbital launch service managers on launch vehicles (Scout, Delta and Atlas) and the International Space Station robotic arm. In other positions in industry, he trained military personnel, provided expertise in the integration and testing of flight and ground communication instruments, developed software for mainframe computers, managed programs and projects and supervised engineers and technicians.